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ABSTRACT

This study examined the views of preschool teachers regarding integrated preschool settings for young children with and without special needs in Massachusetts. Teachers represented urban, rural, and suburban settings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 teachers in such settings. Findings suggest that the conditions under which the teachers implemented integration varied considerably from community to community but that teachers shared a common language to describe integration and common assumptions about exemplary early childhood programs, and were all committed to integration at the early childhood level. Common concerns were identified in the areas of classroom-based issues, time constraints, and administrative issues. Overall, teachers reported that they experienced more difficulty with time and administrative variables than with pedagogical factors in fulfilling their responsibilities. Attached tables provide interview questions and an analysis of responses. (Contains 22 references.) (DB)

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Teachers' Views of Integrated Preschools

Catherine Marchant

Wheelock College Graduate School

200 The Riverway

Boston, MA 02215

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate Integrated Preschool teachers' views of integrated preschool settings for young children with and without special needs to see what might be contributing to the difficulties they and others face in designing and implementing integrated programs at the early childhood level. A semi-structured interview was conducted with ten teachers to probe their thinking about their roles in integrated preschools and to elicit information about the settings in which they worked. The narrative data was analyzed to describe the prototypical experiences and concerns of the teachers. Findings suggest that the conditions under which teachers implemented integration vary considerably from community to community and that teachers experienced more difficulty with sociopolitical variables than pedagogical factors in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The importance of early childhood programs that integrate young children with and without special needs has long been recognized (McLean & Odom, 1988). Over the past decade, a wealth of ethical, legal and emprical evidence to support the concept of integration at the early childhood level has been presented in the literature (Salisbury, 1990). Conceptual and practical guidance is available for educating children with a variety of needs in integrated or mainstreamed settings (Brady & Gunter, 1985). However, "achieving widespread implementation of integrated programs remains a largely unmet goal." (Peck, et. al., 1989, p. 281) Parents and professionals involved in the design and implementation of community programs often report unanticipated opposition, frustration and even failure (Peck, Furman & Helmstetter, 1993). Integration at the early childhood level is presenting more complex realities than originally anticipated.

The Integrated Preschools in Massachusetts are a case in point. Currently, most school districts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts provide young children with special needs access to an integrated setting. Some settings are designed specifically to accommodate both preschoolers with and those without special needs; others are community-based programs willing to make modifications so that children with special needs can be included. The Massachusetts Department of Education has been instrumental in stimulating and supporting the development of integrated programs. In 1989, the Department's Bureau of Early Childhood Programs issued a technical assistance paper, Considerations in Planning Integrated Preschool Programs, to clarify the state's position. Statewide training efforts on mainstreaming and program evaluation have also been instituted to support the professional

development of early childhood specialists from various disciplines who are capable of providing integrated services to young children. Yet, in my personal contacts with teachers of Integrated Preschools through my supervisory and consulting work, I am continually struck by the teachers' professional concerns (and sometimes, doubts) about their programs' ability to provide what is needed by all the children enrolled in their classes.

The purpose of this study was to investigate local Integrated Preschool (IP) teachers' views of integrated preschool settings for young children with and without special needs to see what might be contributing to the difficulties they and others face in designing and implementing integrated programs at the early childhood level. My assumption was that an understanding of IP teachers' perspectives on their day-to-day experiences in integrated settings might uncover previously overlooked or underestimated factors important to the success of integrated programs. Current notions of integration at the early childhood level stem from work done by researchers in model demonstration projects, yet most integrated programs for young children are taught by early childhood practitioners in real public schools or community settings. If integration is to become a widespread practice, then it will need strong support from those practitioners actively engaged in it. Given the importance of involving practitioners in any educational change (Cooley & Kickel, 1986; Hall & Hord, 1987) and ample documentation of the power of practitioners to modify or ignore public special education policy (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977), it would be a mistake to continue to leave teachers out of the professional conversation on integration at the early childhood level.

Methods

Because of the limited amount of documented information on the actual experiences of teachers in integrated early childhood programs, it was felt that a small scale, qualitative inquiry of teachers' perceptions of their work would be an appropriate starting point. A semi-structured interview to be conducted with IP teachers was designed to probe teachers' thinking about their roles in their programs as well as elicit contextual information about the settings in which they worked. Using a qualitative research paradigm (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982), data were gathered to develop an understanding of teachers' perceptions of their integrated preschools and themes emerged from the data to present a picture of integration at the early childhood level from the teachers' unique perspective.

Participants

To minimize the multitude of factors which could contribute to teachers' views of their programs in this study, I purposely chose to interview teachers who worked in one type of integrated preschool, that is, public school sponsored classes designed specifically for three and four year olds with and without special needs. In accordance with state guidelines, these programs could enroll no more than fifteen children, at least eight of whom were considered typically developing. All were housed in public schools and met state early childhood program standards (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1988). The classes were taught by at least one qualified teacher and a second adult. Work with families was a major component of the programs and all

provided therapies (physical, occupational and speech) deemed necessary by children's Individualized Educational Plans.

Ten teachers who had been teaching in public school sponsored integrated preschools for at least two years participated in the interviews. They were selected from recommendations made by area early childhood coordinators who responded to a letter about the study. Effort was taken to include in the group a representation of urban/suburban/ rural communities and an equal distribution of programs known and new to the researcher. The sample included one teacher from a large urban system, four from smaller city school districts, four from suburban communities and one from a more rural area, all within eastern Massachusetts. All teachers interviewed were female and had Master's degrees in Education. They ranged in age from mid-twenties to early-fifties and in teaching experience from two to more than twenty years. While all had some training in both early childhood and special education, seven identified themselves as early childhood special educators while three considered themselves to be early childhood specialists. Regardless of their certification or discipline, the group was well trained and experienced in teaching young children with and without special needs. Furthermore, all ten chose to be integrated preschool teachers.

The children enrolled in these integrated preschools represented the gamut of development and disabilities. They were grouped in heterogenous fashion. Those who enrolled with a diagnosed special need required various language, behavior, cognitive and/or motor interventions. A few other children were identified in need of special education services during the course of the school year. Each class accommodated various types and severity levels of disabilities.

Interviews

Each teacher participated in an interview conducted by the author. With permission of the teacher, the interview was audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. In addition to basic information on the organization, philosophy and operation of the preschool classroom in which the teacher worked, interviews centered around the following:

-teacher's role in the setting,

-how time was allocated for different responsibilities,

-the challenges and joys associated with teaching in the integrated preschool

-and the teacher's vision of a model integrated preschool.

Teachers were also asked to share any other comments they wanted to add about integration. The lead off questions to each area are listed in Table I; however, it is important to remember that additional questions were asked for purposes of clarifiying and probing the teachers' responses.

Insert Table I here

Teachers were interviewed at their preschool sites or another site of their choice. The length of the interviews ranged from approximately fifty minutes to two hours, with most lasting approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. My goal for the interviews was to capture each teacher's perception of the realities she associated with implementing integrated preschools. I tried to remain neutral to each teacher's responses in an effort to legitimize her views and open to findings that were not

anticipated in the preliminary stages of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Data analysis

The narrative data from the ten interviews was analyzed using qualitative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to generate categories to describe the prototypical experiences and concerns of teachers in integrated settings. My intent was not to support or refute the current conditions under which IP teachers in Massachusetts worked, but rather to identify themes underlying teachers' common concerns as potential sources of interference working against the successful implementation of integrated preschools.

Data analysis began with the sorting of transcripts by questions asked and the subdividing of the narratives into meaningful units. At that point, the transcript units were coded according to their descriptive content. For example, descriptors like "working with children" "communicating with families" collaborating with therapists" were used to categorize teacher responses to the question about how they spent their time. At this point, a second rater reviewed the narratives in full to verify the author's categorizing and coding system.

At another level of analysis, the author tallied the number and percent of teachers whose responses fell into the categories. Selected quotes were highlighted to illustrate the teachers' views and additional reviews of the data led to the development of interpretative themes which seemed to run through the narratives. Themes like "Teachers spend most of their time on classroom-based, direct services to children" "Teachers struggle to find time for non-classroom responsibilities such as

home visits, outreach to community programs, etc." were generated during this stage of analysis. The second rater again reviewed the coded data for purposes of checking on the reliability of the author's interpretative themes.

To further insure the accuracy of the author's interpretation of the data, a member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was then conducted with three additional teachers who fit the criteria for participation in the study. Individually, the three teachers new to the study were asked to provide feedback on the categories and themes that had emerged from the original interviews and to compare/contrast them with their own experiences. For example, they were asked to respond to, "Some teachers of integrated preschools have said...Has that been your experience?" In effect, they were asked to corroborate the plausibility of the information gathered and to confirm the meaningfulness of the procedures used in analyzing the data.

At a later date, to improve on the trustworthiness of the data and its analysis, a focus group (Krueger, 1988) was held with five of the original interviewees to allow them an opportunity to challenge, confirm, expand on a synthesis of their individual and collective realities. During the focus group, teachers were asked to verify that the final categories and themes generated for each question held true to their views. For example, they were asked, "Is this really what you were trying to convey?" "Is that what you meant by..?" "Does this accurately portray your experinces?" throughout the focus group meeting. As a result, they often clarified points in the data further and then discussed issues more completely with each other. Notes were taken at this meeting and provided further insight into the teachers' perspectives. Findings from the study were also supported by personal field notes I have collected while supervising

students in practicum in other integrated preschools or observing various IP teams with whom I have consulted.

Essentially, during data analysis, I looked for multiple instances of the teachers' views, squared these findings with others and my own experiences and checked back with those interviewed to make sure that the findings resulted from the teachers' perceptions rather than this researcher's bias. By triangulating the data (Webb, et al., 1965) through the use of different methods, including interviews, member checks and a focus group, and a second researcher, for coding and categorizing purposes, this researcher aimed to increase the credibility of the findings.

Results

The data from this study suggest that integrated preschools vary considerably from community to community, even when they are of a common type and comply with state guidelines. Among the ten programs investigated, there was considerable variation in the conditions under which teachers taught including duration of programs, number of children served, ways in which therapies were provided and how the programs were funded and administered. In spite of such variation, the teachers interviewed here shared common beliefs about integrated preschools and common concerns about how well they were functioning. Table I I provides an overview of these findings.

Insert Table II here

Conditions of teaching

The conditions of teaching in integrated preschools did not remain constant across the programs investigated. In terms of variables like program duration, children served, provisions for therapy, funding sources and administrative organization, the integrated preschools in which this set of teachers taught were very different, as the following synopsis shows.

*The duration of programs varied from one full day, five days-a-week program to three different two and one-half hour group sessions per week. Most teachers (60%) had both a morning and an afternoon session each approximately two and a half hours long. Two teachers taught in four-hour daily sessions. At the extremes, one teacher taught in a full day program while another had three different groups of children in two daily sessions.

*The total numbers of children for whom a teacher was responsible ranged from 12 to 46, with most teachers (70%) having approximately 30 children including 14 with special needs under their care. Two teachers (20%) were responsible for 12 children, including approximately a third with special needs and one (10%) had 15 children, a third of whom had special needs.

*While all programs provided therapies to children with special needs, they did so in different ways. Most teachers (80%) were involved in integrating therapy into the preschool program. Of these eight teachers, four were utilizing a transdisciplinary approach (McDonnell & Hardman, 1988), while four others were experimenting with other in-classroom alternatives. The remaining two teachers were still using a pull out model.

*In addition, programs were funded differently (ie. school district budget, state grant, or special education monies), although the majority were funded from a combination of sources. As a result, teachers were accountable to different administrators (ie. early childhood coordinator, building principal, or special education director), with six reporting to two different adminstrators for different purposes. One teacher had "three bosses," but three teachers were accountable to one administrator who then coordinated with other administrative divisions of the school system. Half of the teachers expressed worry about the funding of their programs.

Common beliefs

Yet, in spite of the differences in the conditions of teaching, teachers interviewed shared common beliefs and concerns about integrated preschools. They used a common language to describe integration at the early childhood level; they held common assumptions about exemplary early childhood programs. Table III lists the descriptors most often used by teachers throughout the interviews when discussing their own preschools or their visions for a model integrated program.

Insert Table III here

Such terminology and the concepts imbedded within are fundamental to the early childhood profession (Bredekamp,1987). In this study, early childhood was viewed by the teachers as the foundation upon which to build integrated preschools.

With regard to integration, the teachers interviewed here were all committed to integration at the early childhood level. They made unqualified positive statements about the effects of integration on preschoolers and their families, often

telling stories about the impact of their integrated preschools on various children with special needs. As one teacher said,

> [a child with cerebral palsy] is just part of the group, and that's why I like this so much because in here,at this age, the children just see each other as they are. [Someone] wears braces, [someone else] pushes too much--but there's no handicap attached to who they are.

Another used this example to express her conviction.

> Now [he] used to be a very destructive little guy...His behavior was out of control, very defiant and mostly he'd swear...his social skills were never all that great. He always kind of pulled off and watched and did his own thing. [But as he gradually started playing with the kids], one day it clicked and he realized, if I do this, they'll be my friends and they'll play with me. And he has been a totally different kid since then.

In addition, IP teachers spoke of the value of integrated preschools for children without special needs, including statements like the following:

> I think it's wonderful. I mean I really love seeing how the children are with each other and how they just start to intuitively know that this child might need a little extra help...I don't know exactly what it is but [integration] certainly works for three and four year olds.

> It's good for all the children in that [some] are getting the models they need and [others] are learning to be models. That's good for the regular education kids in that they're getting to be teachers and friends and they're learning about differences. [Integration] really brings out so many issues about differences, not just special needs.

All but one teacher also noted positive feedback from parents, including satisfaction with the program and learning about special needs, as proof of the value of integrated preschools.

> And most parents come back very, very happy [after their children are here for a few months] , and I think that's a reward [for me]. Plus they can't tell who has special needs and who does not, for the most part.

And that's a good learning experience for them.

I am committed to [integration], I believe that it works....and I think the parents gain a lot and those attitudes [developed here] are carried with them as [their kids] go on in school. I think the parent stuff that goes on between parents of typically developing children and parents of children with special needs is very healthy and very important. I think parents learn a lot [from each other] about what's typical...how their kids fit in.. and how they work within a group. I mean, I just think emotionally it helps all parents to develop, especially when they're working together for common goals and common efforts. That's one of the nice things that happens here.

Stories like these throughout the interviews indicated the teachers' belief in the type of program they were teaching in.

With regard to the teachers' role in integrated preschools, there was equally strong agreement. All teachers interviewed believed that their primary responsibility was to the children and the classroom. In response to questions about how they spent their time, IP teachers immediately focused on classroom-related activities, as shown by the following comments.

A good deal of our time focuses on children and talking about children.

The majority of my time is classroom-based. I do a lot of observing of the children and getting them thinking; then setting things up and watching the kids interact.

I'm mainly responsible for what happens in the classroom. I plan the curriculum and build the program to be responsive to the children.

All teachers also acknowledged the importance of working with families in early childhood. For them, parent work was a natural component of teaching preschoolers. To one teacher, making connections to families was an integral part of planning for the children.

> I spend most of my time preparing for and carrying out my preschool sessions. But parent conferences, discussion groups and phone calls are also part of preparing.

To another, it made little sense to work with children and not with parents.

> I spend most of my time educating kids -- in language development, learning experiences and other planned classroom activities. But parent work is as important..... because parents effect kids' lives more than I do. If I really want to help these kids, I have to help their parents too.

Given IP teachers' commitment to their classrooms, it was not surprising to find that IP teachers' rewards stemmed from their involvement with children. All ten cited children's progress and development as a major source of joy in teaching.

> Seeing the kids grow, seeing them change and they all really do, although you may not necessarily see it everyday. That makes you feel like you are doing something important for kids.

In addition, all ten cited the interaction between children with and those without special needs as another source of their joy.

> You really do see such progress in children interacting with each other. And you see wonderfully touching experiences with kids sharing their strengths and weaknesses. By the end of the year, they've really come to accept each other for who they are.

Furthermore, 70% of the teachers felt they were making a difference for families as well as children. The comments of the IP teachers interviewed here indicated that they saw their role and its rewards centering primarily on children and their learning and secondarily on families.

Common Concerns

Equally striking similarities were noted with regard to the issues about which the IP teachers expressed concern. Table IV contains the categories of concerns most frequently mentioned by teachers.

Insert Table IV here

In conjunction with the teachers' emphasis on their role in children's learning, classroom based issues dominated the narratives on teacher concerns. All ten spoke about ensuring positive interactions among children with and those without special needs. They understood the importance of monitoring children's interactions with one another and structuring the environment so that positive social exchanges would occur. In reflecting on the social growth of children in her class, one teacher explained it this way,

> I wish you could have seen this group before...I mean they did not know about being friends. I did puppet shows...Read a lot of stories..Just talked about how friends act toward each other. And I realized the negative social stuff between kids is just part of learning how to be a friend and if you keep that in perspective, you have incredible opportunities to teach the positive. But you really have to spend time and effort here.

Those interviewed also considered individualization to be one of their primary challenges. Individualizing for children and maximizing their learning was not something these teachers reserved for the children with special needs. "Meeting the individual needs of all children" was foremost on all ten teachers' minds. For eight of the teachers, planning effectively for the full complement of children enrolled was a

related component of individualizing as was communicating with others about the children. These teachers recognized that the kind of individualization they saw necessary to integrated preschools required careful preparation and collaboration with parents and specialists. For one teacher, it meant,

> ..our approach to planning is a very individualized one...in a sense, every child has individual goals...and a good deal of time focuses on talking about the children, communicating with specialists and parents...and then, designing a physical environment and setting up all areas of the classroom to reflect the goals we're working on with the children.

However, the classroom related concerns were not as stressful to the teachers as time constraints or adminstrative issues. Although all teachers in this study considered the preschool classroom to be their primary responsibility, they were also expected to participate in other components of their system's early childhood program including screening and assessment, collaborating with other professionals and mandatory special education paperwork. The school systems allocated time for such work out of the classroom, but the amount of time ranged from one day per week (for 40% of the teachers) to none at all (for 20%) and averaged 4.2 hours per week. Both the lack of sufficient time for these additional responsibilities and the teachers' own emphasis on the classroom made it difficult for them to feel that they could do their jobs as well as they would like. As one individual said,

> ..[Our morning and afternoon sessions] take a lot of preparation. We make an effort to tailor our plans to each group. We spend time on the out of classroom activities at lunch and after school. We find the time to do everything....but it could be more professionally done and better coordinated if we could devote more [time] to these other responsibilities.

For another, finding time to accomplish everything was more problematic.

> We only have one afternoon a week for all this stuff. We usually have a staff meeting and then do our assessments and evaluation meetings--until 4:00...I do all my written reports at night on my computer....My planning I do catch as catch can, whenever I can...There's a lot of extra time I put in during the day too. I'm usually one of the last ones out of the building...

Most of the teachers (80%) also felt that an excessive amount of paperwork was required of them particularly for special education purposes. Teachers reported being asked to write up progress reports on all children twice a year and further document the changes in the children with special needs on a quarterly, weekly or even daily basis. Much of their written work, they considered, "redundant."

Problems within their own organizations also accounted for many of the headaches IP teachers associated with their roles. "Lack of support" "system politics" "excessive procedures" were but three of the examples given by teachers in this study as administrative issues that complicated their lives as IP teachers.

Throughout the interviews, it seemed that the pedagogical challenges the teachers faced were less problematic to them than the non-classroom tasks. When they talked about stresses associated with integrated preschools, they focused on the lack of time to accomplish everything or problems within their systems. Both the speed with which they spoke and the emotional overtone of their talk suggested frustration. Some teachers (60%) openly admitted they were frustrated with this aspect of their role. Later, the focus group confirmed this impression by stating specifically that the stresses associated with their roles were more administrative in nature (ie. "not enough time or support" "problems within our own organization") than classroom-based (ie. "getting to every child" "fully preparing the environment"). As one teacher put it,

> ..when I get to really concentrate on working with the kids, I mean that's the part I enjoy the most. A lot of times I feel I become so bogged down with the paper work and other non-classroom nonsense that I honestly am not able to put all the time into planning and pulling everything together for the kids that I really like to do.

Like the others, this teacher seemed to resent the administrative tasks she was required to do because they distracted her from her preferred role in the classroom.

Added to the time constraints and administrative headaches were increasing numbers of children who had to be served and/or children with more complex needs who were to be enrolled. Teachers knew that larger caseloads would in turn directly impact the pedagogical challenges of teaching in their integrated preschools. One teacher summed up her concerns this way,

> I cannot see, realistically, that all kids can be integrated. I know they're trying to work on it, but I don't know how that's ever going to happen with the numbers of children teachers now have. Also most of the kids coming in, not only [those] with special needs, have their own [unique] problems..We teachers just can't erase their needs...So I'm worried about this inclusion movement, especially with budget cuts, increases in class size and a growing population of very needy children.

In summary, analysis of IP teacher narratives reveals that all participants in this study were strongly committed to integration at the early childhood level, but held equally strong reservations about the manner in which they were being asked to implement integrated preschools. On the one hand, they wanted to provide high quality, holistic, comprehensive preschool experiences to all the three and four year olds entrusted to them, but on the other, they were at odds with the conditions under which they found themselves trying to do so. Conditions related to children served, non-classroom responsibilities and institutional operations interfered with their efforts.

The teachers worried that administrators and policymakers are unaware of the complexity and effort required to make IPs work. In the words of one teacher,

> People don't realize that quality early childhood programs take so much time and effort. You just can't do [everything] on two sessions of two and a half hours, and expect kids to make the kind of progress that you want them to make.

Discussion

For methodological reasons, results of this study should be interpreted with caution. The sample is limited in size and restricted to one type of integrated preschool. Inspite of my attempts to obtain data from a cross section of school districts sponsoring programs, it could be that the findings presented here are specific to the sample. Furthermore, the sample was self selecting. Both the IP teachers and their administrators wanted to participate in the study. Reasons that are not known to the researcher could have motivated the interviews or influenced teachers' responses.

Additionally, these findings may show limited explanation of the sociopolitical factors contributing to the complex realities of teaching in an integrated preschool because they are based primarily on teachers' perceptions of their experiences. A fuller picture of the sociopolitical contexts in which integrated preschools operate could be gained by investigating and incorporating the views of other parties involved in preschool integration including parents and administrators. But such was beyond the scope of this project and instead measures discussed in the data analysis section were taken specifically to increase the trustworthiness of the data.

Furthermore, findings in this study are consistent with those of other studies of integrated early childhood programs. The teachers in this study reported the same positive effects of integration on children that has been noted in the literature

(Guralnick, 1990; Odom & McEvoy, 1990). They verbalized strong endorsement of integration for young children (Peck, Carlson & Helmstetter, 1992). They recognized their role as critical to the success of integrated programs as others have documented (Hanson & Hanline, 1988; Spodek, 1991).

In similar fashion to studies by Peck and his associates (1993), teachers here reported more difficulty with sociopolitical factors associated with teaching in their integrated preschools than pedagogical variables. In spite of ample knowledge of making classrooms work for children, they experienced frustration and difficulty when it came to working within the school systems that sponsored them. They seemed less capable--or at least less comfortable--overcoming the administrative obstacles they faced. While the study did not uncover any new knowledge about obstacles to integration, it resonates to the experiences of other teachers in integrated preschools and hopefully underscores the seriousness of these problems.

This study shed less light on teachers' understanding of their work with families. Most of the teacher narratives analyzed here were child-focused in nature, which is surprising given the current focus on family-centered services in the field today. For the most part, teachers saw their roles centering on classrooms and their rewards stemming directly from children's learning. Whether they preferred to be child centered or were shaped to be so by the conditions in their preschools is subject to speculation. Certainly, there was variation among programs investigated here with regard to the amount and types of contact between teachers and families. But more importantly, there was an absence of details about working with families regardless of the frequency and intensity of contact between teachers and family members. While

the teachers interviewed spoke about working with families, the narratives did not reveal how families fit into their thinking about teaching in an integrated preschool nor did they indicate the scope of their understanding of family centeredness. Teachers made references to "communicating with families", "involving families" in the program, "helping families" understand their children's special needs, but they did not share any particular philosophy or model that framed their interactions with families. They also spoke about struggling to find more time for families, but offered little information regarding the way in which they would use such time.

Several questions come to mind for future research. How do IP teachers define family centeredness and do they strive to achieve this practice in their preschools? Upon what principles of early childhood education are teachers basing their work with families? To what extent have these IP programs been influenced by the child-centeredness of the public school systems that sponsor them? Given the constraints upon IP teachers' time and responsibilities, is it realistic to expect them to provide family-centered services in their programs? These questions need further probing, for their answers are relevant to all early childhood programs.

Implications for practice

The findings reported here hold implications for both teacher preparation and program administration. The teachers' difficulties and frustrations may have stemmed from their lack of preparation for all that the role of integrated preschool teacher involved. While teachers may feel competent in programming and instruction, contacts with families and assessment, it could be they need more training specifically in the area of sociopolitical factors. Perhaps, more understanding of the cultural contexts in

which their programs operated or more skills in advocating for change would have helped this group of IP teachers.

At the least, appropriate preparation could offset some of the obstacles teachers are likely to face in integrating early childhood programs. The results of this study suggest that future teachers would benefit from course content and fieldwork that familiarize them with the problems as well as the positives associated with early childhood integration efforts. Teacher educators could help prospective teachers to analyze the multiple variables operating in settings and strategize ways of overcoming potential obstacles. They could move beyond instructional design issues that have traditionally dominated teacher education programs.

The findings in this study hold implications for administrators and policy makers as well. If IP teachers are going to assume comprehensive roles as was the case here, then they need the time, support and resources to do so. Merely allocating some time for additional responsibilities seems to do little to enhance the overall quality of programs, at least from teachers' perspectives. Program administrators and local school policy makers need to be open and responsive to IP teachers' concerns about the children they serve, the conditions under which they teach and the responsibilities they are expected to assume. More importantly, they need to think about IP teachers in new ways, moving beyond traditional views of teachers as instructors toward a more comprehensive perspective that reflects what early childhood professionals do as they try to provide quality preschool experiences for all young children and their families.

Table I

1. Tell me about your program.
   - Who are the children?
   - When do you meet?
   - What's your curriculum?
   - How many staff are involved?
   - What role do parents play?

2. Tell me about your role in the program.
   - What are your major responsibilities?
   - How did you happen to get the position?
   - Why do you stay?
   - What aspects of the position bring you the most joy?

3. Tell me abou the way you spend your time.
   - What activity consumes most of your day--direct service to individual children, leading groups, overseeing classroom?
   - Do you have one or two sessions?
   - How do you spend time after the children go home--consulting with other professionals, screening/assessing new children, outreach in community, meeting with staff, curriculum planning and preparation, home visits, conferencing with parents, case management, training?
   - Is this a full-time position?

4. Tell me about the challenges associated with your progra.
   - What's been hardest for you?
   - What do you find frustrating?
   - Anything you'd like to see changed?
   - Anything that would make your job better?

5. Tell me how you've tried to overcome any difficulties you've faced.
   - Who do you turn to for support?
   - What mechanisms exist that help you?
   - How do you resolve conflicts?
   - Do you think your difficulties are unique?

6. Tell me your vision of a model integrated preschool.
   - What would it look like?
   - Would you role as teacher be the same?
   - What conditions do you see as essential to the successful implementation of this program?
   - Do you think your vision might be realized in the near future?

7. Please add anthing else you want to share about preschool integration.

Table II

Varied Conditions	Common Beliefs	Common Concerns
Program duration	Language of early childhood	Classroom based
Numbers of children served	Commitment to integration	Time related
Provisions for therapies	Importance of teacher's role	Administrative complications
Funding and administration	Rewards from children	

Table III

Category of descriptors	Specific terminology used	Teachers
Curriculum	thematic approach	10
	hands on materials	8
Instruction	developmentally appropriate practice	10
	experiential learning	8
Environment	learning centers	10
	child size equipment	7
Additional features	family work	10
	multidisciplinary collaboration	9

Table IV

General category of concern	Specific issues mentioned	Number of teachers responding
Classroom related	Ensuring positive interactions among children	10
	Meeting individual needs of all children	10
	Planning effectively for a wide range of children	8
	Teaming/communicating with parents/specialists	8
	Integrating therapies	5
Time related	Not enough time for classroom and other responsibilities	10
	Excessive paperwork	8
Administration related	Problems within own organization	9
	System procedures/politics	8
	Budget constraints	7
	Problem with space or facilities	3

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